

ISAIAH

ISAIAH 49:8-13, WORLDWIDE SALVATION, PART 3

There is a debate concerning whether or not these verses apply to Israel alone or to the nations. It does seem to be a bit ambiguous in that regard. Many commentators apply these verses to Israel only in connection with the nation's release from the Babylonian captivity, but the role of the Servant involves both Israel and the world. That was very evident in Isaiah 42:6, and the role of the Servant was specifically applied to both Israel and the nations in the immediately preceding verses in Isaiah 49:6-7. Once again, the revelation of the conditions of restoration in the land do not match up with the release from Babylon, but they do match up with the end times restoration of Israel.

Isaiah 42:6 "I am the LORD, I have called You in righteousness, I will also hold You by the hand and watch over You, And I will appoint You as a covenant to the people, As a light to the nations,

"Although 'people' frequently refers to God's covenant people, the context of 42:6 argues for a more universal covenant for all people, including Israel. This Servant poem addresses God's plan for both Israel and the nations in 49:6, so it would be improper to limit this restoring of the land and release of the captives to the return of a few thousand Hebrews to Jerusalem from Babylonian exile. Isaiah 49:6-7 and 12 (plus the Servant in chap. 42) relate to the Servant's work to the eschatological plans of God for Israel and all the nations" [Gary V. Smith, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture: Isaiah 40-66*, 353].

Paul applied Isaiah 49:8 to Gentile salvation in his second letter to the Corinthians.

2 Corinthians 6:2 ²for He says, "AT THE ACCEPTABLE TIME I LISTENED TO YOU, AND ON THE DAY OF SALVATION I HELPED YOU." Behold, now is "THE ACCEPTABLE TIME," behold, now is "THE DAY OF SALVATION"—

"Paul's use of this verse (2 Cor. 6:2 [quoting from Isaiah 49:8]) shows that he clearly understood it to apply to the messianic age (which had come with Jesus)" [John N. Oswalt, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66*, 298]. "The apostle Paul quotes this passage to show 'the acceptable time' is any-time during the age of grace following the death and resurrection of Christ (2 Cor. 6:2), including the church period. But that by no means implies that this Scripture was fulfilled in the Christian church, whose outcalling was latent in the Old Testament but unrevealed to Old Testament saints" [Merrill F. Unger, "Isaiah" in *Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament*, 1279].

I would not get dogmatic about it, but it seems that this verse is applicable primarily to Israel, but also to the nations. It also has eschatological elements in it that appear to be related to the Tribulation and beyond to the Kingdom.

Isaiah 49:8 ⁸Thus says the LORD, “In a favorable time [עַת רְצוֹן] I have answered [עָנִיתִי] You, And in a day [יּוֹם] of salvation I have helped [עָזַרְתִּי] You; And I will keep You and give You for a covenant of the people, To restore [קוּמִי] the land [אֶרֶץ], to make *them* inherit [נַחֲלִי] the desolate [שְׁמֵמָה] heritages [נַחֲלֵיהָ];

Yahweh is responding to the despondent words of the Servant in verse 4 and offering encouragement in the form of a prophetic promise of future success concerning His appointment to service.

Favorable time, עַת רְצוֹן, when used as a reference to God, expresses the divine good will which He extends to humanity as He sees fit at a time determined by God. Favorable means pleasure, delight, desire, will, favor, or acceptance. The concept of “favorable time” was used by the prophet Isaiah to refer to the Second Coming.

Isaiah 61:2 ²To proclaim the favorable year [שְׁנַת רְצוֹן] of the LORD And the day of vengeance of our God; To comfort all who mourn,

The Lord initiated His ministry by quoting Isaiah 61:1 and the first clause of verse 2, but not the remainder of verse 2 which will not be fulfilled until the Second Coming (cf. Luke 4:16-21). We should also note that Isaiah 61:1-4 is very similar to Isaiah 49:8-13. In chapter 61, it is quite clear that it is the Servant, the One anointed by God, who delivers Israel.

The “favorable time” and the “day” are parallel. The use of these words indicates something that is the plan of God. There is nothing haphazard or serendipitous about this time; it is in the plan of God and it must come to pass. “... He [God] has heard the Servant's request in an acceptable time, literally, ‘in the time of [God's] good will,’ that is, in accord with His plan for the ages of time and for eternity. With regard to Israel, ‘the acceptable time’ will be during the Tribulation, when a remnant will believe on Christ, and at the second advent, when the nation will be converted en masse” [Merrill F. Unger, “Isaiah” in *Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament*, 1279].

Many theologians relate this particular time to the Jubilee Year. “The thought is based upon the year of Jubilee, described in Leviticus 25:8ff. It is that time when God shows favor to His people, namely, the period when Christ was upon earth, the fullness of the times (Gal. 4:4). It lies not in the past but in the future. Paul agrees with Codex Vaticanus in rendering *an accepted time* (2 Cor. 6:2)” [Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah: A Commentary*, vol. 3, 3:278].

I agree with the thought Young expressed here, in terms of this being a future event, but I would also suggest it is more in alignment with the Messianic Kingdom, which is the event to which the Jubilee pointed, and not the First Advent. “The Jubilee Year looks to the restoration of Israel by the Messiah and to the resulting messianic Kingdom of peace.... When Messiah comes, He will break the chains of Israel's oppression. But this deliverance will come only when the nation has first repented of her sin. The nation must repent (Yom Kippur) before the shofar will sound the release of her captivity (the Jubilee Year).... Finally, in Messiah's glorious day, there will be Jubilee rest for the land and freedom for God's people ...” [Kevin Howard and Marvin Rosenthal, *The Feasts of the Lord: God's Prophetic Calendar from Calvary to the Kingdom*, 198-200].

Young doesn't understand the relationship between the Kingdom and the Jubilee Year because he does not believe in a literal 1,000-year Messianic Kingdom. Dispensational theologians do not have that theological handicap. "The terms used in this verse recall the relief that came to the Israelites in their Jubilee Year. The salvation in view will appear in the Millennium, which the Jubilee Year anticipated. Then too the Servant will represent Israel" [Thomas L. Constable, *Thomas Constable's Notes on the Bible, Volume IV: Isaiah-Daniel*, 4:140].

As an amillennialist, Young writes things that at times sound dispensational, but they are really amillennial in nature so you have to beware of that when reading his commentary, or else you will be led into a false understanding of the Scripture in question. For example, concerning this verse, he wrote, "The picture refers primarily not to the return from the exile, but to the reestablishment of the Davidic Kingdom under the Messiah, when all the true seed of Abraham will receive their promised inheritance" [Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah: A Commentary*, vol. 3, 3:279]. On the surface, this sounds quite accurate and biblical, and if you don't understand replacement theology and amillennial thought, you would be deceived. However, for Young and those amillennial theologians of like mind, the "true seed of Abraham" is the church, and the inheritance is awarded to those in the body of Christ in the eternal state, not in the Messianic Kingdom.

Answer, עָנָה, means to answer, to respond, to reply. In this context, it refers to God's response or answer to the despondent lament of the Servant (v. 4). The response may be a verbal reply or an action of some sort. This is a perfect verb which denotes completed action, but this is a "prophetic perfect" which will be completed in the future. "I have answered," as the NASB translates it, recognizes completed action in the past, not future completed action. Most English translations do not make this distinction, but it is an important one, because this has yet to take place; it is future. Some do identify the future tense.

Isaiah 49:8 ⁸This is what the LORD says: "At the time I decide to show my favor, I will respond to you; in the day of deliverance I will help you ... (NET Bible)

Isaiah 49:8 ⁸This is what the LORD says: I will answer you in a time of favor, and I will help you in the day of salvation.... (CSB)

In terms of grammar, "I have helped you" is also a prophetic perfect rendering the past tense NASB translation less than adequate. "I will help you" is the preferred, more accurate translation, because it points to the future fulfillment of this prophecy. A scroll found at Qumran has these words in the imperfect verb tense which is the meaning "I will answer/help You" reveals. Help, עָזַר, means to help, to aid referring to giving aid or assistance to another. There may also be an element of rendering service in the meaning of this word. The word is primarily used in terms of providing help in the form of military assistance. If we understand this verse to be a reference to the Second Advent then that sense fits the revelation of the conquering King, accompanied by "the armies which are in heaven" (Rev. 19:14), destroying the armies of the beast and the kings loyal to him (Rev. 19:19) with "the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse" (Rev. 19:21). "Assistance to the nation of Israel is a common theme in Isaiah. Again the picture

here has a military nature. Because of God's aid, Israel will be successful in overcoming her foes" [Harris, Archer, Jr., and Waltke, s.v. "עָזַר," *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 660-661].

The Servant is promised by Yahweh that on a day of salvation He would help Him. Day, יוֹם, means a day referring to a unit of time from sunset until the next sunset including evening and morning, but it also may refer to an unspecified period of time. This day is unspecified. Does it refer to the First Advent, to the cross, to the Second Advent, or to the ministry of the Servant in total? This is not an issue that we can get dogmatic about. Psalm 22 is a Psalm the Messiah applied to Himself during His First Advent and particularly to His experience on the cross, and verse 24 refers to the fact that "when he cried to Him for help, He heard." On the other hand, the references to the land that follow suggest the end times restoration of Israel into the land in faith. Furthermore, national Israel did not experience salvation on the day Christ died on the cross. They will finally realize national salvation on the day they cry out to the Messiah to save them from annihilation at the hands of the world's armies under the direction of the antichrist which is a Second Advent situation. The context also relates this day of salvation to the time when the covenants are finally fulfilled in their entirety through the Servant who will be "for a covenant of the people."

The Servant has been identified as a light to the Gentiles whose salvation will be worldwide (Is. 49:6), and, as previously noted, the covenant to the people may refer to everyone and not just to the Israelites who enter the Kingdom although that is not specified. The problem with that thought is that the only covenant promise God made to the nations was in the Abrahamic Covenant when He promised Abraham that "in you all the families of the earth will be blessed" (Gen. 12:3). Therefore, that is a possibility for understanding the "covenant to the people."

Another way to understand it is that the covenant promises will find their fulfillment in relation to the work of the Servant, and "... the Servant would be a covenant-mediator for the people of Israel" [Michael Rydelnik and James Spencer, "Isaiah" in *The Moody Bible Commentary*, 1082]. In Isaiah 42:6, it was revealed that the Servant would be appointed by God to be "a covenant to the people," but exactly what it means to be a covenant is difficult to determine. The concept of covenant-mediator may be the best way to understand it since God's Kingdom was originally designed to be a Mediatorial Kingdom under the rule of a man serving God and carrying out His will for His creation.

To what end is all this? Two issues are revealed in this verse and one more in the next verse. In this verse, it is to cause the restoration of the land and to cause them inherit their desolate heritage. The concept of inheritance precludes any idea that this represents the nation's freedom from the Babylonian captivity. The land was not reallocated to the various tribes upon their return from Babylon. Instead, the reallocation of the land to the tribes awaits the inauguration of the Messianic Kingdom (cf. Ezek. 47:13-48:29).

God is going to cause the land to be restored. The land was not restored right away when the Israelites returned from the Babylonian captivity. Additionally, it was not devastated in the way this Scripture relates, but it will be during the Tribulation. The land of Israel and rest of the planet will both need a massive amount of restoration when the Kingdom

begins. This infinitive construct relates to purpose, intention, and result. It is in the causative verb form meaning it is God who is going to do the restoration, not the Israelites. Restore, קָוַם, means to rise, to arise, to establish. The sense is to institute, enact, or establish. It is variously translated "rebuild" (NET Bible), "raise up" (ASV, LEB), and "establish" (KJV, LSV).

This is not necessarily a reference that is exclusive to the land of Israel. Land, אֶרֶץ, means earth or world, and land, ground or soil. If it means world or earth, it is referring to the surface of the earth where humankind lives. If it refers to a land, it is referring to a territory that is understood as a separate geographical entity over which control may be exercised by one or more political entities. Given the eschatological nature of this verse, it is quite possibly a reference to the whole planet which will need to be restored and set in order once the Tribulation ends. "Earth" is the interpretation used in several translations: KJV, NKJV, YLT, LSV. However, Gentiles are never said to have an inheritance in terms of land, but Israel does have a land inheritance.

The land will be made fit to inherit which is an indication of the Abrahamic Covenant's fulfillment, and it will only be inherited by means of the Servant's work on Israel's behalf. We know that Israel and the earth are going to experience a tremendous amount of damage during the Tribulation. How that will be repaired and how long it will take is not clearly revealed in the Word of God, but this verse seems to be saying that God will be the agent restoring the earth after the Tribulation.

The land was frequently referred to as Israel's "inheritance," and the restoration of the desolate land so that it may be reassigned to the tribes of Israel as their inheritance is the context. That will not happen until the Messianic Kingdom is inaugurated. The modern state of Israel does not fit this biblical revelation. The land inheritance was not reassigned among the various tribes in 1948, and Israel will, during the Tribulation, once again be driven from the land and will regain it only when the Servant, the Messiah, rescues them from destruction at the end of the Day of the Lord.

Joshua 13:6–8 "All the inhabitants of the hill country from Lebanon as far as Misrephoth-maim, all the Sidonians, I will drive them out from before the sons of Israel; only allot it to Israel for an inheritance as I have commanded you. ⁷"Now therefore, apportion this land for an inheritance to the nine tribes and the half-tribe of Manasseh." ⁸With the other half-tribe, the Reubenites and the Gadites received their inheritance which Moses gave them beyond the Jordan to the east, just as Moses the servant of the LORD gave to them;

Inherit, נָחַל, means to receive, or to take property as a permanent possession. It relates to property or land given by one person to a successive generation. This was an allotment from God to the Israelites in perpetuity according to the unconditional Abrahamic Covenant. Once they are in the land to possess it according to that unconditional promise of the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 12:3, 15:17-21) and the Land Covenant (Dt. 29:1, 30:1-10), the land will be reassigned to the various tribes just as it was assigned in the beginning by Joshua after the Exodus. This verb form is causative meaning that God is going to cause this allocation of land to go to the Israelites in order to restore them in fulfillment of the covenant promises. It does not seem likely that Gentile nations are the subject of any specific land inheritance; the Bible never refers to that circumstance. The Gentiles were

allotted nations (Gen. 11:8-9), national boundaries, but that was never termed an inheritance.

The land was described as desolate, *שָׁמָיִם*, which means to be desolate, devastated, destitute, laid waste, ravaged, ruined, deserted referring to being in a destroyed and ruined state, implying the object or area destroyed is now abandoned from all help, deserted, or in personal poverty. This describes a state of destruction the land of Israel, and the world, have never before seen.

The land of Israel will have to be restored in order for the Israelites to realize the heritage that was bequeathed them by God several thousand years ago. Heritage, *נַחֲלָה*, means to take possession, inheritance, property, or land given by one person to a successive generation. It refers to inalienable, hereditary property. The sense of this word identifies any piece of property that passes by law to an heir on the death of the owner; sometimes regarding God's promises to His people, like the land of Israel or a heavenly kingdom. In this context, it identifies the land of Canaan that was conquered and distributed among the tribes of Israel.

These words are all connected to the Abrahamic Covenant and God's unconditional promise to settle the believing Israelites in the land He conveyed to them several thousand years before.

The following verses refer to conditions that cannot be applicable to the Israelites return to the land following the Babylonian captivity. In addition to restoration and inheritance, the third issue identified here is freedom from captivity. These things must be references to the end time regathering of Israel into the land at the end of the Tribulation.

Isaiah 49:9-10 ⁹Saying to those who are bound [*אֶרְבָּר*], 'Go forth,' To those who are in darkness [*הַחֹשֶׁךְ*], 'Show yourselves.' Along the roads they will feed, And their pasture *will be* on all bare heights. ¹⁰"They will not hunger or thirst, Nor will the scorching heat or sun strike them down; For He who has compassion on them will lead them And will guide them to springs of water.

One other issue in terms of captivity and the Babylonian exile, is that there is no record that the Israelites were imprisoned in Babylon at that time. In fact, Jeremiah encouraged the Israelites in Judah to give themselves over to Babylon so that it might go well with them instead of suffering the deadly siege that was forthcoming (cf. Jer. 27).

Bound, *אֶרְבָּר*, means to tie, to bind, to imprison. It refers to one who is a captive or a prisoner, that is, someone who is in confinement.

Darkness, *הַחֹשֶׁךְ*, literally means the absence of light resulting in darkness. The word is often related to the concepts of judgment or a curse. In this context, it is referring to spiritual darkness. "Metaphorically, just as light was associated with God and goodness, so darkness was associated with evil. Just as evildoers usually did their evil deeds under cover of darkness, so darkness was a metaphor for the wicked and wickedness" [Willem A. VanGemeren, gen. ed., s.v. "הַחֹשֶׁךְ," *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, 2:312].

This favorable time involving a day of salvation, is a day when people will be set free from both physical and spiritual captivity. For the Jews, the Tribulation will be a time of persecution like no other in their history—and they have experienced some serious persecution. During that time, they are being persecuted, which is a form of physical captivity either in concentration camp type settings or self-imposed captivity in order to avoid persecution. But the Jews are also in spiritual captivity to Satan's world system, and that will not change until they are in danger of annihilation at the hands of antichrist and cry out to the Messiah for deliverance. Because all of these blessings are fulfilled in the end times, the captivity, physical and spiritual, from which they are released must also relate to the end times. "The inclusion of freeing the prisoner and those in darkness recalls 42:7 where the blindness that was covering people's eyes will be removed [by the Servant] in the eschatological era when God establishes his kingdom" [Gary V. Smith, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture: Isaiah 40-66*, 354].

A number of things in verses 9-10 relate to the blessings that will abound in the land during the Messianic Kingdom. Although not overtly stated, the imagery used here is that of a shepherd and his sheep. This is also a hint of the divine providence and care the Israelites experienced during the Exodus that will also be experienced on the return to the land in belief to inaugurate the Kingdom. The truths revealed in Psalm 23 also seem to be applicable to this context. They will feed along the road and find pasture on what was formerly bare heights. Baren areas will be become productive and there will be easy, convenient access to life sustaining sustenance. They will not hunger or thirst, nor will they suffer the ill health that results from scorching heat.

The reason for this state of affairs is leadership. "It is easy to talk about restoration, but how do we get from where we are to where we need to be? The Servant's ministry is not merely to set them free from the bondage of sin but also to lead them the full way home to God's presence" [John N. Oswalt, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66*, 298]. This theologian only inadvertently hits on the truth here. He does not believe in a literal 1,000-year Kingdom; therefore, he has to relegate this revelation to spiritual truth only. He acknowledges the leadership role of the Servant in getting the people back into the land, but he cannot understand that this is a revelation of people being led back to the land in belief after the Tribulation ends to realize all of Yahweh's unconditional promises promised to them.

Replacement theologians cannot understand these verses to mean a return of Israel to the land in a state of belief that inaugurates the Kingdom, because they do not believe in a literal Kingdom, and they do not believe that Israel as a nation will continue to exist. Young, for example, has to relegate these revelations to evangelism, i.e., the proclamation of the Gospel [cf. Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah: A Commentary*, vol. 3, 3:279], which is a view that cannot understand the time frame, the context, or the eschatology involved.

We know that the Lord will send His angels around the world to lead or bring the Israelites into Israel once the antichrist and his armies of the world are defeated by the King of Kings as He returns to save Israel.

Matthew 24:31 ³¹“And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.

Isaiah 11:12 clearly states that the Lord will “assemble” and “gather” the believing remnant of Israel and Judah back into the land of Israel. How He will do it is not stated. Whether He is somehow personally involved or relies entirely on angels to do the work is not known. We do know that the Lord will make a way for the Israelites to travel back to the land.

We also know that during the Tribulation there will be tremendous changes to the earth's topography. The Lord will make the way back to Israel as easy as possible. This verse does not specifically say that this highway leads back to Israel and Jerusalem, but when put to the test of the analogy of Scripture, it is clear that is the situation being revealed.

Isaiah 49:11-12 ¹¹“I will make all My mountains a road, And My highways will be raised up. ¹²“Behold, these will come from afar [רְחֹקִים]; And lo, these will come from the north and from the west, And these from the land of Sinim [סִינִים].”

This verse is not the only Scripture in which the prophet reveals a highway, or highways, the Lord will create that facilitate the return of the believing remnant to the land (Is. 11:16, 35:8-10, 62:10).

Some theologians deny the literal understanding of this verse. “This imagery pertains to sheep so the interpreter needs to be careful not to interpret all these things that God will do as literal changes in the climate or the geographic features of the land. Elsewhere God does mention the transformation of the land into a place like Eden (51:3), but this message primarily communicates the idea that God will compassionately take care of all his people's needs” [Gary V. Smith, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture: Isaiah 40-66*, 355]. The figure of speech used may refer to sheep, but they represent people, and the text indicates that the Lord will actually make roads and highways amidst the destruction resulting from the judgments of the Tribulation to facilitate the return of the Israelites to the land. There is no need to deny the text on this point. He also contradicts himself when he concedes that the climate and the earth will be changed to facilitate a Garden of Eden like land. It seems that at this point in the chapter, the focus has changed to Israel alone and the nation's return to the land. “Verses 10-12 look beyond the deliverance from Babylon in 536 B.C. toward the future glorious kingdom. The Lord will call the Jewish people from the ends of the earth and gather them again in their land” [Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary: Prophets*, 55]. My conclusion is that there is no reason to deny the literal understanding of this verse. God is going to smooth the way for the Israelites to be gathered into the land in belief for the second and final time in their history as a nation (Is. 11:11) whether led back by angels or finding the way on their own.

“God will also make His mountainous barriers as flat as a road so His people can come to His habitation. He will also build His highways so they will be thoroughfares for His people” [Thomas L. Constable, “Isaiah” in *Thomas Constable's Notes on the Bible, Volume IV: Isaiah-Daniel*, 4:141].

The Israelites will return to the land from all over the globe. Nothing will stop them from returning and all the Israelites will return this time, which was not the case when they were released from the Babylonian captivity by King Cyrus.

Interestingly, no one knows where Sinim is located. Guesses include China and Aswan, which is in Egypt, but those are really only guesses. Sinim, סִינִים, refers to “an area to the south, possibly same as the Aswan area of Egypt ... note: some identify this with the Chinese, Persian, Indian and other suggestions” [James A. Swanson, s.v. “סִינִים,” *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)*]. Interpreters get Awan from Syene, סִינַיָה, (cf. Ezek. 29:10) which is a city near the island Elephantine and Aswan on the southern border of Egypt. The problem with that explanation is that is not the same word; two different words are used which presumably identify two different places.

In the final analysis, no one knows what it means! Most lexicons don't even have the word in them. It obviously has geographic implications, but beyond that, we have no idea what area of the world this is identifying. It meant something to the people of the prophet's time, but that meaning has been lost to us. The word as it appears in most English translations, including the NASB, is simply a transliteration of the Hebrew which, in and of itself, is devoid of meaning.

“Neither distance (*afar*) nor dispersion (*north ... west*) can stop them, nor can strangeness of location: *Aswan* [NIV, ISV] is only a guess at the original *sînîm*. It is most likely that Isaiah was being consciously obscure. Even unmapped places are known to God, and even from them he will gather his pilgrims” [J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary*, 312].

We know from this Scripture and others that the Israelites will return to the land from all over the world. Some theologians try to force that precise meaning into this verse, which is unnecessary. “Instead of the more usual east-west, north-south pattern, here the poet moves around the compass from east (*afar*) to north to west (*the sea* meaning, as usual, the Mediterranean) to south (*Syene*)” [John N. Oswalt, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66*, 300]. I cannot find any basis for forcing the concept of “east” into the word translated “*afar*.” *Afar*, רָהוֹק, means distant, far off, remote referring to an amount of separation between two spatial points. The sense is that of a distant region. There is nothing in this word that should suggest a translation meaning “east.” It also seems that forcing Sinim to mean something in the south when the location is uncertain is something that should not be done. It is an error to try to force an explicit meaning to these words in an exegetically questionable way even though the thought may be accurate.

The worldwide regathering of Israel identified here nullifies any thought that this Scripture refers to the return from the Babylon captivity in the sixth century BC. That was not a worldwide return in scope; it was from one Asian country in the Middle East. Also, there was no reason at that time for the highways God will create to facilitate the return at the end of the Tribulation when there will be widespread topographical changes and destruction when such highways will be necessary, because there was a perfectly good

highway back to Israel at the time. This is not the first time that Isaiah has referred to this return (cf. Is. 43:5-6). Buksbazen believed, I think erroneously, that these verses related to the Babylonian captivity, but he admitted that the “description of the return of the exiles from Babylon goes far beyond that historical event and anticipates the final ingathering of the people of God into their transformed and blessed homeland, Isaiah’s ‘Pilgrims Progress’” [Victor Buksbazen, *The Prophet Isaiah: A Commentary*, 383-384].

Jeremiah declared this end times return will be one that is even greater than the Exodus. However, it is not even remotely possible to claim that the return to Israel from the Babylonian captivity overshadows the Exodus to the extent that the Israelites will grant it importance over the march out of Egypt and to Canaan. The final return to the land that inaugurates the Messianic Kingdom will be granted that status.

Jeremiah 16:14–15 ¹⁴“Therefore behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when it will no longer be said, ‘As the LORD lives, who brought up the sons of Israel out of the land of Egypt,’ ¹⁵but, ‘As the LORD lives, who brought up the sons of Israel from the land of the north and from all the countries where He had banished them.’ For I will restore them to their own land which I gave to their fathers.

Verse 13 is a hymn of praise. The reference to the heavens and the earth are expressions of totality. The reference to the mountains may be an acknowledgment that the physical creation itself is rejoicing at the salvation enveloping the heavens and the earth. Paul revealed that the creation itself was waiting to be set free from its “slavery to corruption” (Rom. 8:19-22).

Isaiah 49:13 ¹³Shout [רָנְנוּ] for joy, O heavens! And rejoice [גִּילִי], O earth! Break forth into joyful shouting, O mountains! For the LORD has comforted [נָחַם] His people And will have compassion [רַחֵם] on His afflicted [עֲנִי].

The creation is commanded to shout for joy and to rejoice over the work accomplished by the Servant. The Tribulation has ended, Israel has been saved and brought into the land, and the Kingdom is being inaugurated. Back in Isaiah 1:2, the creation was called forth to hear the case God had against Israel. Now the nation, and the world, have been saved by the return of Messiah and that is cause for joy and exultation. The world is called to rejoice over the work the Servant has accomplished with Israel. The benefits of His work with Israel flow across the world as He acted as a light to the Gentiles at the same time that He was raising up the tribes of Jacob and restoring Israel (Is. 49:6).

Shouting for joy and rejoicing represent the concepts of exuberant praise and worship. These words are frequently used in the Psalms.

Shout, רָנַן, means to give a ringing cry, to shout or sing for joy referring to making loud public melodic and rhythmic words with a focus on the joy it expresses. The sense is that of producing a song with the voice as a response of joy.

Rejoice, גִּיל, means to shout in exultation, to rejoice referring to an attitude or feeling of favorable circumstances. The sense is to express great joy.

Afflicted, עָנִי, means the poor, the afflicted, the wretched referring to those who are suffering, in a state of poverty, oppression, misery from various causes. In the context of Isaiah, spiritual affliction is a large part of the meaning in this context. That is a problem for people now, Jew and Gentile, as they live in Satan's Babylonian world system, and that will be a problem for people as they live in the final form of Satan's Babylonian world system in the end.

Comfort, נָחַם, means to comfort in an effort to alleviate sorrow or distress and to provide emotional strength to someone. This verb form is intensive; the Lord will intensely comfort His people when they are finally delivered from annihilation and Israel is saved. Comfort is what Yahweh does for His people.

Compassion, רָחַם, means to love, to have compassion, to show mercy, or to show love by having feelings and by taking actions of kindness and concern for one in difficulty regardless of one's state of guilt for an offense. This is a description of Yahweh's heart towards His people, but this includes Gentiles as well, after all, "... God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son ..." (John 3:16).

This is an expression of the joy that will be expressed by the world concerning not only God's work with the Israelites and Israel, but with the redemptive work that returns the world to a state that will be more in accordance with God's original intent for the creation. The world's nations will finally realize Israel's role in the world and, for the first time in history, Israel will be a nation accepted not only as a nation in the world, but as the head nation of the world.

The world's people will finally realize the futility, the evil, and especially the spiritual darkness under which they had lived and suffered in Satan's world system and from which deliverance will be cause for great joy in Israel and around the world.